

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION

South Downtown I-405 Access Study

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DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL

DIRECTION

Staff is asking Council to identify alternative(s) preferred by the City to meet the transportation needs for the South Downtown area and to provide the recommended alternative(s) to WSDOT. The I-405 Access Study will inform WSDOT's future environmental review and freeway access revision request processes in connection with WSDOT's I-405 proposal, which will be initiated when funding is available.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Move to identify the Lake Hills Connector Southbound On-Ramp and associated local street improvements as the alternative that provides the best balance in meeting transportation needs and minimizing negative impacts for the South Downtown area.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

This study was intended to develop, analyze and identify alternative(s) preferred by the City to meet the transportation needs in South Downtown in connection with WSDOT's I-405 project. The I-405 Access Study will inform WSDOT's eventual project, including WSDOT's environmental review and freeway access revision request processes when future funding is available for WSDOT's proposal.

The I-405 Corridor Program Master Plan approved in 2002 includes a new half-diamond interchange in the NE 2nd Street vicinity to improve vehicle access to/from the south. In spring 2020, the City, in collaboration with Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), began the South Downtown I-405 Access Study as a conceptual planning effort to identify I-405 connection alternatives that meet the City's transportation needs and are consistent with the current land use plans and growth.

The I-405 Access Study confirmed the continued need for additional access to South Downtown from I-405 identified in the I-405 Master Plan. As part of the I-405 Access Study, the City will provide its recommendation to WSDOT, and the information provided by the City as a result of this Study will inform WSDOT's environmental review and access revision request processes when funding is secured for WSDOT's proposal. Environmental analysis, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) approvals, and funding for the project are required before WSDOT formally selects a preferred alternative for its I-405 proposal.

The study team identified a dozen initial options. Through Tier 1 analysis, a fatal flaw screening process, staff recommended five alternatives to carry forward for further analysis in Tier 2. Council

unanimously approved staff's recommendation at the September 28, 2020 Council Study Session. The five options studied by the City are:

1. Lake Hills Connector southbound on-ramp;
2. SE 6th Street extension with southbound on-ramp;
3. SE 6th Street extension with express toll lane access to and from south;
4. NE 2nd Street extension to Wilburton; or
5. No Build, which serves a baseline to compare alternatives and is required by FHWA and WSDOT.

I-405 Access Study Analysis

The study team analyzed the five options using the following criteria as vetted with the stakeholders and approved by the Council:

- Existing plans and urban design considerations
- Congestion reduction/travel time consideration
- Access and safety considerations
- Property and economic development impact considerations
- Cost considerations

Listed below are the results from the analysis.

Lake Hills Connector southbound on-ramp

This option provides a new southbound on ramp from Lake Hills Connector. It complements the existing I-405 northbound off-ramp to Lake Hills Connector.

Align with adopted plans and urban design policies

- Adds auto access only; no bike lanes and sidewalks, no east-west connection. No significant policy conflict with existing land use and urban design policies.
- Aligns with the I-405 Master Plan and is compatible with the representative alignment for the Kirkland to Issaquah via Bellevue light rail project.
- The elevated structure causes permanent impacts including shade, lighting, noise, and water quality.

Travel time (compared to No Build)

- Saves 500 daily person hours.
- Reduces intersection PM delay by 6 percent compared to the No Build.

Access and safety

- Restricting westbound left turns from NE 4th Street onto I-405 southbound enhances connection between Downtown and Wilburton.



- May reduce the rate of vehicle rear-end collisions because of reduced congestion.

Impact on property and economic development

- No significant property impact identified
- Added access to I-405 supports future economic development

Cost estimate

- \$150 million, including right-of-way, environmental mitigation and construction escalated to 2030 dollars.

SE 6th Street extension southbound on-ramp

This option elevates and extends SE 6th Street over 114th Avenue SE and I-405 to Lake Hills Connector and builds an on-ramp to I-405 southbound. It complements the existing I-405 northbound off-ramp to Lake Hills Connector. It also provides bike lanes and sidewalks on the new east-west connection.

Align with adopted plans and urban design policies

- East Main Transit Oriented Development plan did not envision a ramp at SE 6th Street. Requires policy amendment and would add delay to the land use code amendment work.
- Aligns with the I-405 Master Plan and is compatible with the representative alignment for the Kirkland to Issaquah via Bellevue light rail project.
- The elevated structure causes permanent impacts including shade, lighting, noise and water quality.
- The added access to I-405 and multimodal east-west connection between East Main and Wilburton aligns with City's multimodal policy.

Travel time (compared to No Build)

- Saves 700 daily person hours.
- Reduces intersection PM delay by about 10 percent.

Access and safety

- The added bike lane and sidewalk improves access and safety for non-motorized users.
- Extending SE 6th Street improves East Main - Wilburton connection but removes direct vehicle access between 112th and 114th Avenues via SE 6th Street.
- May reduce the rate of vehicle rear-end collisions because of reduced congestion.

Impact on property and economic development

- Planter strip and potential parking lot impacts along 112th, 114th, and 118th Avenues SE and SE 6th Street.
- Requires approximately 0.82-acre of right-of-way from adjacent properties.
- Temporary impacts in the Wilburton park-and-ride lot during construction.
- Additional access to I-405 supports future economic development.



Cost estimate

- \$175 million, including right-of-way, environmental mitigation and construction escalated to 2030 dollars.

SE 6th Street extension inside access

This option elevates and extends SE 6th Street over 114th Avenue SE and I-405 to Lake Hills Connector and builds direct I-405 express toll lane access ramps to and from the south. This is the only option studied by the City that provides two new ramps. It also provides bike lanes and sidewalks on the new east-west connection.

Align with adopted plans and urban design policies

- The added access to I-405 and multimodal east-west connection between East Main and Wilburton aligns with City's multimodal policy.
- Aligns with the I-405 Master Plan and is compatible with the representative alignment for the Kirkland to Issaquah via Bellevue light rail project.
- East Main transit Oriented Development plan did not envision a ramp at SE 6th Street. Requires policy amendment and would add delay to the land use code amendment work.
- The elevated structure causes permanent impacts including shade, lighting, noise, and water quality.

Travel time (compared to No Build)

- Saves 1,400 daily person hours.
- Reduces intersection PM delay by about 7 percent.

Access and safety

- The added bike lane and sidewalk improves access and safety for non-motorized users.
- Extending SE 6th Street improves East Main - Wilburton connection but removes direct vehicle access between 112th and 114th Avenues SE via SE 6th Street.
- May reduce the rate of vehicle rear-end collisions because of reduced congestion.

Impact on property and economic development

- Planter strip and potential parking lot impacts along 112th, 114th, and 118th Avenues SE and SE 6th Street.
- Requires approximately 0.64-acre of right-of-way from adjacent properties.
- Impacts about 40-50 parking stalls in the Wilburton park-and-ride lot.
- Additional access to I-405 supports future economic development.

Cost estimate

- \$325 million, including right-of-way, environmental mitigation and construction escalated to 2030 dollars.



- Both the City's Comprehensive Plan and WSDOT's I-405 Master Plan call for a new interchange in the South Downtown area.
- Maintains existing conditions with no further critical area impacts.

Travel time

- No travel time benefits because of no improvements.

Access and safety

- The rate of vehicle rear-end collisions may increase due to increased congestions.

Impact on property and economic development

- Does not require acquiring property to build improvements.
- No additional access to support future economic developments.

Cost estimate

- No cost.

Community engagement

The project study team, with the support of consultant PRR Inc, carried out a robust community engagement process using several online venues. The process included the four stakeholder forums, two public open houses, and a series of meetings with individual stakeholders and interest groups.

Stakeholder feedback

Stakeholders are identified as people who may be directly impacted by WSDOT's I-405 project if and/or when that proposal is funded and moves forward. They include the following individuals:

- Business/property owners or developers within the study area
- Representatives of neighborhood associations that are entirely or partially located within the study areas:
 - Downtown Bellevue Residents Association
 - Surrey Downs Community Club
 - Wilburton Community Association
 - Bellecrest Neighborhood Association
 - Woodridge Community Association

At the fourth stakeholder forum, the study team shared Tier 2 analysis results and conducted post forum opinion polls. Below is a list of major themes from the input received from stakeholders on each of the five options studied by the City.

Lake Hills Connector southbound on-ramp

Received most stakeholder support with some concerns.

- Reasons for support for this option include cost-effectiveness, adherence to existing policies, minimal impact to existing property owners and planned development, safety improvements, and access to southbound I-405.
- Concern that this option does not provide an east-west connection and is auto-centric.

SE 6th Street extension and southbound on-ramp

Received most stakeholder support but adjacent property owners expressed strong opposition.

- Reasons for support for this option include another multimodal east-west connection, greatest reduction in delay times, and lower costs than the other SE 6th Street extension option.
- Concern that this option would require amendment to existing City policies and would add additional time to the East Main TOD land use code amendment; impacts adjacent property owners' access, needs additional right-of-way, and impacts from traffic noise and shade create by the elevated structure.

SE 6th Street extension inside access:

Received most stakeholder support but adjacent property owners expressed strong opposition.

- Reasons for support for this option include additional vehicle carrying capacity and another multimodal east-west connection, and higher congestion reduction benefits.
- Concern that this option would require amendment to existing City policies and would add additional time to the East Main TOD land use code amendment; impacts adjacent property owners' access and right-of-way, impacts from construction noise and shade, and high cost.

NE 2nd Street extension

Received minimum stakeholder support with strong opposition.

- Reasons for support for this option include lowest cost, provides a multimodal east-west connection, and will provide a better connection with the future light rail than other options.
- Concern that this option does not meet study criteria of providing a new I-405 access point; has major property and wetland impacts; and does not provide traffic improvement benefits.

No Build

Received minimum stakeholder support.

- Concern that this option does not provide a new I-405 access to support economic development.

Community online open houses

The first online open house was launched in early August and lasted three weeks. It introduced the South Downtown I-405 Access Study to the public and asked for feedback on seven transportation improvement options that passed initial fatal flaw screenings. The second online option house was launched in mid-February and lasted for two weeks. It shared detail analysis findings of the five options studied by the City. The purpose of the online open houses was to discover issues the community may have with the options that the City was including in the I-405 Access Study.

The City received over 350 comments on the I-405 Access Study from both virtual open houses (combined). Below are the key findings:

- Support and concern expressed for each option studied by the City
- Support for improving I-405 access and reducing freeway merging and weaving
- Support for multimodal connections
 - Pedestrians

- Bicyclists
- Transit riders
- Concerns:
 - Would not solve congestion on I-405.
 - Would induce traffic impact local streets and contribute to climate change.
 - High cost and would divert resources from funding other high transportation priorities.
- Some downtown residents suggested reconsidering the Main Street option. (Note: This option did not pass the fatal flaw screening).

Presentation to interest groups

At invitation, project team members presented Tier 2 analysis findings to Bellevue Downtown Association, Bellevue Chamber of Commerce Transportation Committee, and Eastside Transportation Association. These groups have indicated that their boards will formulate and communicate their recommendation to Council directly.

Recommended Alternative

Based on the findings from Tier 2 analysis and input received from communities, the project team recommends identifying the **Lake Hills Connector southbound on-ramp** as the option that best meets the City's needs for the following reasons:

- It meets the primary objective of providing additional access to I-405.
- It is aligned with urban design policies and allows the East Main TOD land use code amendment work to move forward without additional delay.
- It would provide significant travel time reduction benefits and reduce delays at intersections within the study area with minimum property and environmental impacts.
- It is expected to improve vehicle travel safety and reduce rear-end collisions by reducing congestion.
- It is more reasonable to fund than the most expensive option.
- Stakeholders are generally supportive.

The project team recommends that the City provide the Lake Hills Connector southbound on-ramp to WSDOT for consideration as the City's preferred alternative when WSDOT's I-405 proposal receives funding and moves forward.

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Policy Impact

The City's Comprehensive Plan identifies NE 2nd Street as a tentative location of a new interchange with I-405 (Comprehensive Transportation Project List – 67). Additional City policy considerations that inform the location of further connections to I-405 in the South Downtown area include:

- **Policy TR-1:** Integrate land use and transportation decisions to ensure that the two mutually support the Comprehensive Plan.
- **Policy TR-2:** Strive to reduce congestion and improve mobility.
- **Policy TR-26:** Increase system connectivity for all modes by providing for vehicular, transit, pedestrian, and bicycling facilities to create a Complete Streets network throughout the City.

- **Policy TR- 52:** Design arterials and streets to fit the intended character of the areas through which they pass.

Fiscal Impact

There is no immediate fiscal impact to the City. The City will provide its preferred alternative as a recommendation to WSDOT, but WSDOT's I-405 proposal is expected to be funded by the state. The final project design, environmental analysis and construction will be carried out by WSDOT. The City may choose to participate financially when WSDOT's proposal is funded.

OPTIONS

1. Identify the Lake Hills Connector southbound on-ramp and associated local street improvements as the alternative preferred by the City and as recommended by the project study team in order to inform WSDOT's I-405 proposal.
2. Identify a different alternative or combination of alternatives analyzed in Tier 2 as the City's recommendation to WSDOT.

ATTACHMENTS & AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS

N/A

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

N/A